

Time and Disregard © CM John T. Clark, #11690, EH TieCorps

-SOMEWHERE IN NEW REPUBLIC SPACE- EARLY 25 ABY

-“And now this ship is ours, Lieutenant Commander Clark.”, the woman in the Rebel Allia..., no, in the New Republic uniform said with a broad smile, after the stars outside had changed into white lines and then the nothingness of Hyperspace.

-“Yes, sir Commander Bakul, sir!” was the quick reply from the man sitting in the first officer seat on the bridge of the Corellian Corvette 'Nightingale'.

-Bakul turned with a smile, her shoulder-long hair flowing: -“No need to be so formal, John. I guess all this imperial training isn't gone even after four years in re-education...”

‘And another in 'Fleet Worthiness Estimate' and another two to come here, and be the second in command on a training flight in an old Corvette with a 80 percent former Imperial crew.’ Clark thought, but didn't say.

Instead he lifted his head and smiled: -“Old habits die hard, sir.” At least they had all agreed on the title sir, which was linked to her rank and not her gender.

Clark continued working on a couple of routine maintenance reports and after around 15 minutes found a certain alteration from normal function he had been looking for, in a report from engineering. With a suppressed smile he erased the message and continued working for another 20 minutes.

Then he stood: -“Sir, may I ask you to come to my quarters to discuss a private matter with Engineer's Mate Logan?”

Bakul was confused: -“What's the matter Lieutenant?”

-“Well, it seems he has a personal problem that might interfere with his duties and he wanted to discuss it with us two in private.”, a reassuring smile, “And as the good and friendly first officer I try to be, I offered my quarters as 'neutral ground'.”

-“So then I will try to be a good and friendly Captain!” the Commander replied with a laugh, not noticing the flinch from the communications officer on deck. “Mister Kurz you have the bridge and the Con!” he told the navigations officer, as if there was anything to be done on the bridge during a sixteen hour Hyperspace jump.

The two officers found Logan standing in front of Clark's quarters, and while John ushered the Commander into the room he exchanged a quick look with the Engineer's Mate. The small nod was almost invisible, as was another smile on Clark's lips as he entered the room last, locking the door behind him. As Logan sat on a chair and Bakul opposite him on the second and last one in the room, the Commander didn't notice her first Officer standing just behind her.

-“So what is your problem, Mister Logan.”, she gravely asked, and was surprised by the broad smile that preceded Logan's reply. -“Well, sir”, he almost spat the title, “to be honest it was you, but I think the problem will be solved in a matter of seconds.”

Before Commander Bakul even understood the last problem in *her* life a hand came down on her head to push her chin onto her breasts. A split second later the small knife entered her skull just under the occipital bone, severing the spine in the process. The last thing she heard was a “For the Empire!” mumbled into her ear.

-SOMEWHERE ON THE NEW REPUBLIC BORDER- MID 18 ABY

-“You've got an incoming from nine, Azurin!”, was all Clark could do to help his fellow pilot. The two X-Wings behind his Assault Gunboat were his biggest problem at the moment. But so far he had been able to keep the two obviously green pilots from getting a solid shot at his ship, at least none that his shields couldn't catch and recover from. Seeing the large triangle shape of the Challenge just 15 klicks away an idea came into his mind and he reduced frontal shield power another notch for a little extra speed, as he headed towards the Star Destroyer.

Just 20 seconds later the Gunboat was on the other side of the Chal, short one X-Wing that got chewed up by the Anti-Fighter Batteries of the Challenge. And now it was time to solve this other problem. With a quick tab of his control stick Clark faked an evasive manoeuvre that even the green boy in the X-Wing could anticipate, to his pity the achievement lasted only a couple of seconds longer. Another jab at the stick and the Gunboat was right behind the X-Wing, a stream of laser fire cut through it's shields, armour plating and pilot.

As if he had known it a second later Colonel Murleens voice came through the COM:

-“Clark, would you mind doing your job and attack that Assault Frigate on 235 decimal 347! And if you haven't noticed Morph is out of the picture and had to abandon to the Chal with category four burns!”

Clark's “Yessir!” was acknowledged with a grunt and that was that.

Looking for fighters targeting him specially in the mad Multi-Capital ship frenzy that was developing around the small Asteroid field, Clark found his target and changed his system settings to be prepared for the frontal assault he had to pull through now. Checking again that the two Space Mines were properly fused he headed for the frigate that was pouring long range fire into the VSD Formidable, who herself was busy with a MC-40 class Cruiser. Again Clark was lucky as the Assault Frigate's sensor personnel didn't realise the danger coming for them in the form of the small Gunboat, only when Clark was 10 seconds out from perfect launch range did the covering fire of the laser batteries begin. A couple of small Anti-Fighter laser shots managed to hit the shields but to no avail. Half a kilometre from the ship the two pieces of heavy ordnance continued on their semi ballistic path while the Gunboat arched away in a series of evasive manoeuvres. A bright explosion lit up the Clark's helmet visor as the Frigate exploded behind him.

With a smile Clark activated his COM:

-“Colonel, the Frigate is toast. I request to head for the Challenge to get another pair of mines.”

After a rather lengthy period of several seconds Murleen answered:

-“Negative Commander. Be advise Challenge Actual just told me that we are to cover Subjugator's retreat.”, a sigh, “Orders are to harass enemy Capships so everyone can get in a decent Jump position.”

Thus, Clark spun around his Gunship and evaluated a couple of targets. Doing harassment runs without a wingman was not as easy as it sounded if one wasn't into the buisness of committing suicide. As he scored a couple of useless hits on some Frigates, Corvettes and one MC-40 Clark watched Battlegroup XII retreat, leaving behind the remains of a couple of dozen Starfighters and the burning hulk of what had once been the Interceptor 'Derrick Quaven'. When the 'Subjugator' finally entered hyperspace the retreat signal for Battlegroup III was sounded as well. Thunder and Omicron Squadrons were to provide cover for the rest of the fleet as it's smaller ships scrambled to get into jump positions. When only the 'Challenge' herself and the VSD 'Formidable' were left to go into position a quick flicker of pseudo motion caught Clark's eye, and it brought a surprise of the bad kind: an Assault Carrier flanked by two Dreadnoughts appeared on the starboard flank of the 'Challenge'.

Just a split second later the COM chirped again, this time with orders from the Challenge:

-“This is Challenge actual, Omicron Squadron is to engage the new enemy formation designated Raid five. When the Battlegroup has retreated the Squadron will jump to emergency point Delta and proceed to base.”

As usual Murleen was quick in estimating the situation.

-“We form up in three Formations. One Missile Boat and one Defender will form two of them.

Clark, you will form up with the remaining two Defenders, take the lead and get out as many systems of the Carrier as you can!”

The orders were implemented nearly as fast as the acknowledgements from the fighters came in. And so a short squadron of fighters moved in to assault. Luckily the Assault Carrier seems to have been loaded for an operation against Capital ships, as the sensors showed mainly Y-Wings to leave its hangars. The two intermingled B-Wings tasted the last Concussion missiles from the Missile Boats and then the fray began. Clark didn't know what exactly got him, but as he was just returning from a run aimed at the Hangar bay of the Carrier, where crews could be seen running towards X-Wings, his Gunship got a hit as if by the hand of an angry god. For a moment Clark wondered why he was suddenly moving outside his craft, then he came to realise that it was disintegrating around him. Just as he was reaching for his emergency beacon as something shaded his eyes, he didn't even manage to look up before one of the dorsal fins of the gunboat knocked him unconscious.

-THE NEW REPUBLIC BATTLESHIP 'HISTORY'- MID 18 ABY

“Clark, John Terrance, Identification Number 11690, Emperor's Hammer Strike Force. Clark, John Terrance, Identification Number 11690, Empe..” the tired voice was stopped by an angry scream. “I already know that from your flight suit!”, a hit with the stun baton, “Now tell me something new!” A pause a moment to refocus: “Clark, John Terrance, Ident...”, this time just the baton but two times, the same angry voice, “Something I don't already know!” A cough, followed by a spit of blood, “...Number 11690, Emperor's Hammer Strike Force...” Another blow from the baton, then the burly man turned and left the room.

And for the first time in half an hour of interrogation Clark, closed his eyes for longer than a blink. It was a mistake, the focus he had gained from his special point right next to the door was gone and replaced with burning pain all over his body. Two deep breathes, a try to remember the relaxation techniques from some old form of Martial Art, a sigh, better. Then the door opened again, this time two young men in what seemed to be pilot's uniforms following the interrogator.

-“Yes that's the guy you wanted to see, the one who blew up the 'Gallant Haven'.” a mischievous grin, “Ohh, it seems I forgot something in my quarters, you better not do anything stupid, the Cameras seem to be malfunctioning.” he left.

Cracking his knuckles one of the pilots stepped forward:

-“So you killed my brothers, eh?”

“Clark, John Terrance, Identification Number elevensixni..”, the blow came very surprising, the kick that followed not. Then the second man stepped forward, and the straight kick to the groin was too much as Clark slumped together onto his chair, only held upright by the bindings and the continues blows from the angry Rebels.

-“Has he told us anything of value?” the Captain asked the burly interrogator.

-“No sir, we got nothing from him except his name and ID...”, a short pause, “ I event tried to, well, use some special methods, but to no avail.”

-That raised the Captains interest: “I assume the rules of war are being followed on my ship?”

-“Of course, sir. Although we might have transferred the scumba..., err pardon me, prisoner to the medical centre a little earlier, as he seems to have been more damaged by his ejection than we thought at first...”

- “Office Jenkins, if I hear anything of physical harassment of a prisoner on my ship I will have the one responsible removed from his position!” the Captain boomed, “ Have I made myself clear?”

-“Yes, sir, nothing like that is happening, sir!”, came the quick reply.

-“Good, Jenkins, Dismissed!”

The man quickly left the bridge, and after entering the turbo lift started to curse. ‘Who would have thought this stupid X-wing jockeys would almost kill that bastard... And then the scum bag had a Bacta allergy, so the ruptured lung had reacted violently to applications. DAMMIT!’

-SOMEWHERE IN NEW REPUBLIC SPACE- EARLY 25 ABY

-“Good job, Johnny.”

Logan came around to help with carefully slipping Bakul's body from the chair. The knife had struck perfectly, there was just a hint of blood around the wound.

-“Take a hold of her, I've got to fetch something.” Clark said and turned towards his closet, after a quick search he produced a two by two metres plastic sheet and placed it on the ground.

A minute later the body of the former Commanding Officer was neatly wrapped. After the package was placed on Clark's bunk and covered with his sheets, the men turned and embraced:

-“One way or another this farce finally ends.”, Logan stated.

-“You know who's the covered intelligence guy?”, he asked.

-“Yes Daniel, it's one of the cooks, Private Gerrard. But more importantly, do you know how many men we have for sure?”

-“Just under two thirds, that is roughly 350 men, including all but four out of engineering and, and nearly all enlisted former Imperials.” he looked at Clark, “Should be more than enough if we can get the bridge, but that was your job.”

John smiled: -“That shouldn't be a problem, I've got Communications and Navigation, and you remember the Blaster at the COM console...”

-“All right, so you go back to the bridge and I look for the cook?”, Daniel asked.

-“That was my plan, after we have all these things under control, I will assume command.”

Clark then turned again to get something else out of his closet.

-“This is a copy of the key card for the armoury, the pass code is delta six foxtrot one bravo charlie. Get some men you can trust 100 percent and let them take on armour and blasters, we might need that so call men when all is done.”

Logan just nodded, the men shook hands again, and went on their ways.

When Clark entered the bridge he was greeted by a loud “Attention on deck CO approaching!”, coming from the communications Officer. John nodded approvingly and looked at the man, he had a blaster sticking in his Tunic pants now, and on the side of the bridge lay the corpse of the unlucky Lieutenant Kurz. The other four permanent members of the bridge crew had agreed to 'Commo' or decided that arguing with the man with the blaster was a bad idea.

-“Navigation, ETA?”

-“Just over five hours, sir.”, the man replied smiling at his new commander.

-“Thanks, Nav. So we got another three hours until we need to have the situation resolved.” he turned, “Com, anybody tried to phone home?”

-“No, Commander Clark, I had the liberty to blocking all communications except the Comlinks you specified, sir.”

-“Excellent, Lieutenant Brisen!” Clark answered, just to make clear that he knew the names of his fellow mutineers as well. Just a second later his COM chimed.

-“What is it Daniel?”, he asked

-“I've got four men in battle armour and with blaster rifles coming to the bridge. Jonathan from security sends his regards and says he's got enough cells to hold whoever and how many you send them down.”

-“Thank you Dan, and now about the spy!”

-“Aye, aye, sir!”, came the reply, “Out.”

A couple of minutes later the four armed men reached the bridge, and Clark's question as to who doesn't want to keep doing his job made one man leave again with the cuffed engineering officer.

A small fire fight in the galley and two hours later it was over. Clark straightened himself and activated the ship wide communications system.

-“My fellow crewmen, this is you CO Commander John Clark speaking. As you might have noticed we have taken command of the 'Nightingale' from it's Rebel personal. We will make a scheduled stop in Mariana system in two hours. There is only a small underdeveloped settlement on the planet

and we will drop of all prisoners, and everybody who prefers not to return to our home in the Aurora system there. The prisoners will not be harmed, we are after all Imperial Soldiers, bound by the rules of war. On a further note this ship is now known as Imperial Corvette 'Nightwrath'.”, Clark stopped for a moment, “I want to thank all crew members for working together to make this possible. For the glory of the Empire! Out.”

-THE SURGUT PENAL COLONY FOR IMPERIAL OFFICERS- MIDDLE 21 ABY

The idea of getting out of the Brigs of several Capital ships and starbases had sounded good in the beginning, as sitting in one and a half by two metre cell wasn't exactly fun. Actually Clark had looked forward to a little more contact with fellow officers than half an hour a day during lunch.

Going to a planetary penal colony didn't seem so bad, though John had never even heard about Surgut. Which wasn't a good sign as time proved. The Planet sucked. Period.

Clark had arrived seventeen months ago, in the middle of the summer. Then it has been bad. Temperatures during daylight of close to 45 degrees Celsius and just 5C to 10C less during the night. And as it was a penal colony, the 'inhabitants' worked a lot.

When John had arrived, the colony had existed for only a year, and it showed. The only fixed structures visible to the inmates were the guard towers, where crews of five soldiers manned a heavy repeating blaster and some pain inducing ray unit. Well, nobody could say that the men weren't working hard to change that, but the situation was at best primitive. A klick from the Camp was a mountainside and there the men cut stones, transported them back on unpropelled repulsorlift platforms, and put them on top of each other to create crude stone barracks. But at least all this was done under more or less professional supervision, and serious injury was not the norm.

Now in autumn it had become worse, and wouldn't change fast with a stellar rotation time of almost five standard years.

The weather had changed from terrific heat and dryness to a time of continuous rain, with temperatures in the teens on the Celsius scale. In the mud the work was even worse, but at least the huts were up now, and the double tarpaulin ceiling did hold up most of the water.

Then one afternoon, when the weather had been too bad even for them to work the 're-education' sessions started. A bright young Rebel Officer entered the main hut, where all inmates gathered for the daily roll call, and started a fine lecture about the atrocities of Imperial Forces throughout the war. He even had a couple of interesting Holo-vids with him to support his points. Seemingly the Camp commanders thought it quite a success, and so the sessions became a regular event, feeding ever more and more 'useful information for reintegration', a slogan the young rebel had made up, to the Imperial Officers.

Clark was hardly able to suspend his disbelief as, after several sessions, quite some of the prisoners started to take a more and more active part in the lectures, leading to lively discussions about the pros and cons of the so called Democratic principles of the 'New Republic' and the outrageously inefficient and evil rule of the Emperor....

Seemingly this was noted by some of the men he had made friendly contact with during the past months, and so after one especially controversial session one of the older Officers, former Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Daniel Logan, approached Clark.

-“Well, they tell a lot of bullshit in there, eh?”, he asked rhetorical for a grunt as Clark's reply, “But you better not show what you think too openly, if you ever want to leave this rock...”

Having himself not even pondered the possibility as flight seemed close to impossible, Clark couldn't not reply:

-“What makes you think we *will* ever have a chance to leave?”, he answered, “You've got a shuttle hidden in your buttocks?”

That triggered more than a laugh, Logan, nearly burst into tears from this bad joke.

-“Not exactly but, if heard rumours, that the Rebs are trying to start 'reintegration' in earnest. Seems they're looking for all the qualified people they can get”, he explained, “I guess we can expect a call for volunteers in the next couple of weeks, so better beware!”, and with a pat on John's back he left.

-THE IMPERIAL CORVETTE 'NIGHTWRATH'- EARLY 25 ABY

The drop off had worked as well as it could, with no resistance offered to the mutineers. Of the 500 crewmen 153 decided to leave, which was fine with Clark. For the short leg towards what the ship's log had shown as the outer fringes of 'Post-Imperial Faction Territory, Emperor's Hammer', there was no need for auxiliary personal for the weapons turrets, especially assuming that every combat encounter was likely to end with the destruction of 'Nightwrath'.

-“All right, navigation. Go to jump speed when the calculations are over.” Clark ordered.

-“Sir, I am glad to say that the weapons are 100 percent operational.”

Clark acknowledged the report with a nod. They would have to stop in another Rebel system, as a direct flight into EH controlled space was impossible due to a large star's gravity field blocking the way. The records showed no presence except a couple of fighters in that system, so they should live through it. As ordered navigation just announced the Jump and off they were for a short jump covering only around 30 lightyears.

Again the blackness of Hyperspace again changed into white lines then rapidly moving stars. And then they saw the system's star just under 23 lightminutes away. Unfortunately also a shape filled the forwards viewport. Just under 23 Kilometres away an Assault Frigate was moving towards the deep of the system at sublight flank speed.

-“Navigation, hold steady!” Clark ordered at once, “Lieutenant Brisen, open a channel!”

After a split second of hesitation the Lieutenant complied: -“Channel is open, sir.”

Clark took a deep breath and started talking: -“Frigate at 345.035, this is the Corvette 'Nightingale' on a training, flight, please identify!”

A short pause then a young voice came in on the COM: -“This is Assault Frigate 'Illian', we are on a disaster relief mission.”

-“Do you require assistance?” John replied at once, hoping for the answer every normal Captain would give.

This time the reply took a little longer: -“That's a negative 'Nightingale', our records show a green crew on you, better proceed to your OP area.”

After a sigh of relief Clark answered: -“Copy that, 'Illian', good luck on your mission. 'Nightingale' out.”

-“That was close, John.”, navigation breathed.

-“I know that.” came the reply, “And now try not to be too suspicious moving into jump position.”

-THE SURGUT PENAL COLONY FOR IMPERIAL OFFICERS- LATE 22 ABY

-“...and thus we again selected a couple of you Officers to be allowed to volunteer for fleet worthiness check-ups. The list will be posted in the main barracks.”, the man smiled almost excessively, “Thank you for your attention!”

As usual the inmates were quick to shuffle towards the list, hoping for *any* chance to get off the planet. This time it was Clark's turn to be glad. And even his friend Jeff Logan were on it.

After they applied to volunteer it was all rather quick. Every man to leave the planet fetched their few personal belongings and two days later assembled on the parade-ground to be ferried out in an old Corellian Transport.

The voyage to Imperial Cen..., err Coruscant lasted a while, but the men were glad to be in a climate controlled environment, even though it was a little crowded. The 'Estimation Centre' was a rather lush place, as far as lush places existed on Coruscant. The men were quartered in eight six bunk bedrooms in a closed off section of the Centre. The days themselves were, at first, rather dull, being compromised mainly from hour long 'counselling' sessions every day. These obvious loyalty tests were mixed with less evident actions, when actual occupational training had begun. Clark was to be trained for Capital ship command, which seemed sensible for the New Republic as he had shown a certain grasp of tactics and strategy, and letting him into a star fighter was deemed to unsafe for now.

It was a night three months after the screenings had begun that Jeffrey Logan weaselled into the room Clark was sleeping in. A whisper woke him up: -“Shhh, come on out I have to talk to you!” The two went out of the room and after the door had closed John had to ask:

-“What is it in the dead of night?”

Logan answered with a smile: -“I have made a decision that will make it possible for your to actually manage to get out of here.”, he looked around, “You know that I'll never pass all this tests, so I managed to fetch this.”, he pulled a small blaster from the small of his back.

-“Now what do you want me to do with this?”, Clark asked, a little take aback.

-“Nothing, my friend. You will just go and tell our friendly wardens that you think you saw a prisoner with a weapon.”

Clark was seriously shocked now: -“I am not going to rat anybody out, Jeff!”

-“Yes you will, while I take out the two real rats I have located.”, Logan spoke with such an icy determination that John didn't even try to contradict.

Silently he simply embraced his friend, knowing it would be the last time.

-“When shall I call them?” he asked.

-“Three minutes from now.”, Jeffrey sighted, “Good bye my friend.” He rose and silently moved into the dimly lit corridor.

Clark sat down and silently counted to 150, then he stood and moved towards the sections door.

-“Hey, hey I've got something to tell you!”, he banged his fist on the door.

The man standing guard opened quickly:

-“What is it?”

-“I've seen someone with a blaster in the section”

Before the Guard could reply the sound of a Blaster shot and a scream echoed through the section.

-THE 'FLEET WORTHINESS ESTIMATION CENTRE'- LATE 24 ABY

Clark looked into the mirror and didn't quite like what he saw. Even with the new rank pins of Lieutenant Commander the uniform looked out of place to him. And the sloppy design. Ahh how he missed the style of a good old Imperial Navy uniform. As he had worked hard to get where he was now it had become more and more unlikely for him to see them in larger numbers again. Five years ago some traitorous officer had started to dismantle the remains of the Empire by signing a peace treaty with the Alliance. But even though it had kept rather quiet the Emperor's Hammer seemed to be still alive, but most likely just small enough nuisance for the 'Republic' that it didn't require a full scale offensive. But at least that nerving Mon Mothma had died finally.

As Clark was still in his thoughts the door alert chimed. -“Come in!”, John quickly ordered. It was the person he did expect but least wanted to be here.

-“Good Afternoon, Commander Bakul, how are you this fine day?” he asked.

-“Quite well actually, and now come on we need to be at the reception in 15 minutes.”, she smiled a sexy smile, “You wouldn't want to miss us getting introduced to our new ship, would you?”

-“Of course not, Commander.”, Clark turned and moved towards her, “Please lead the way!”

-THE IMPERIAL CORVETTE 'NIGHTWRATH'- EARLY 25 ABY

-“Twenty seconds to normal space, sir.”, navigation announced.

Clark didn't reply but simply waited for the fall out of Hyperspace. It came quickly enough and the view port was suddenly filled with Aurora's Nebula and the shape of a Victory II Class Star Destroyer.

-“Hail them!”, was John's quick order.

-“Channel is open, sir”, came the reply from Communications.

-“This is the Corvette 'Nightwrath', Commander John Terrance Clark, Identification Number 11690. Request to dock to return to Imperial Service.”, he rather solemnly announced.

-“We're back home...”, Navigation breathed.

-“Indeed we are, Lieutenant, indeed we are.” Clark replied, a tear running down his cheek.